25 Wives a Year

The Product of this Illinois Institution

A Home Sewing Circle — *Girls Dance as a Means of Physical Culture*

NINETY-ONE bushels of tomatoes were canned this year by an Illinois institution that turns out twenty-five wives a year who know every detail of perfect housekeeping.

The other day a big canning house down the state telegraphed the Illinois Training School for Girls, located at Geneva, asking how many cans of vegetables it would need for the coming year.

"We won't want any from you or any one else outside of our home; we raise, preserve, and eat the product of our own farm." This was the answer Mrs. Ophelia Amigh wired back to the concern that expected to make a big sale to the state. In learning how to do this and other kinds of household work, hundreds of Illinois girls have fitted themselves to become perfect housekeeping wives. The girl who leaves this institution has been trained to cook, bake, sew, wash, iron, and to trim up a house that will be the pride of any appreciative husband in the land.

Trained for Life's Battle.

Today scores of girls who have been found without the home they ought to have, have been sheltered in this noble institution and trained how to successfully meet the battles of life. One hundred and twenty-five are now employed in lucrative positions. Colored girls who were picked off the streets of Chicago are now teaching school in Oklahoma. Others have found places in other callings, but, better than all, scores have found honest husbands who today are proud of the wives and the homes that are now presided over by these well trained young women.

The girls who have married have largely become the wives of farmers and are now in homes that the husband owns. A large number of railroad engineers have wives who were trained in this school. Every now and then a proud young mother visits the hospitable roof. She brings from one to three bright faced children, who, Supt. Amigh says, are the best dressed and best behaved children that today are growing toward American citizenship.

Within the last two years a dressmaking department has been added to the institution. No girl who has not a natural ability in that line is admitted to the department, but there are many who readily take to the work. The girls in this department are making most of the clothes now worn by the young women who have left the institution and are working for their living. The employed girls pay for the work out of their earnings. The forty or more attendants in the institution also patronize the clever apprentices, who are steadily acquiring a valuable knowledge of a paying business.

Divided Into Ten Big Families.

There are ten families of girls in this big training school. Each family has from twenty-five to thirty girls under the direction of a managing matron, a housekeeper, and a laundry matron. A girl is put in the kitchen for a period of three months, and there, under the direction of practical teachers, she learns every detail of kitchen work, including cooking, baking, scrubbing, washing, and preserving. There are girls who work in the morning and others in the afternoon so as to give all an opportunity to attend school. One after another other departments of housekeeping are thoroughly taught and learned. While this instruction is being imparted each child is being carried through the eight grades of instruction employed in city and country schools so that they may enter a high school from this institution. Drawing and music are taught and the walls of the institution are decorated with the products of pen and pencil wielded by the students of different classes.

Girls between the ages of 10 and 18 years of age are committed to the school, which is given the care and custody of the ward until the age of 21 is attained. They are committed by Juvenile courts and by courts of record from all of the counties of the state. After a child has been in the school for a period of not less than one year she may be assigned to a home, the environments of which are investigated before she is allowed to take up her abode there. The girl must make a periodical report until she arrives at the age of 21 unless she marries. Her earnings are sent to the institution and banked and held in trust for her, necessary expenses being deducted. Every child of the school is provided with a bank book for this purpose. Some of the girls have accounts that run over $100, and in the aggregate the institution is now holding a large sum of money in trust.

The demand for girls by good families is active and many have found good homes.

Call Institution Their Home.

A visitor is employed by the institution to call on the girls who are out at work or in homes, but many make frequent calls at the institution of their own free will. The superintendent talks to several of them over the telephone every day. It is a common occurrence for a girl who is at work or on a farm to call up the home and ask for advice concerning a matter of which she is in doubt. Some of the girls have come home to be married and the ceremony takes place in the cozy parlors of the administration building. On a recent occasion one of the girls died at the home and the funeral services were held there. On this sad occasion quite a company of the girls who had been in the school came long distances to attend the funeral.

The other day it was necessary for the superintendent to refuse admittance to two Chicago girls. The cause was from the lack of room. The capacity of the school is 214, but there are now 261 in the institution. A large room in the attic of one of the buildings is utilized as a dormitory. The state is expected to furnish another cottage soon.

Connected with the school is a farm of ninety-one acres, and it is expected that this will be increased. The products of this farm go a long ways toward feeding the big family. All of the work is done under the direction of a farmer whose wife was one of the girls of the institution.

Man Who Has Written 5,000 Poems.

W. D. NESBIT'S ANNUAL OUTPUT IS 700 PIECES OF VERSE.

TO have written 5,000 poems and still to be a young man are things suggesting a record in the newspaper side of literature.

In all these thousands of iambics, anapestics, trochaics, and dactylics not to have one love poem goes further and smashes all records in all times.

Then, out of these thousands of poems to have taken only eighty-six to represent his first venture into the world of books—

And the reader has several lines upon the personality and character of Wilbur D. Nesbit, who for ten years has been writing 500 poems a year for newspapers, and who at the present time is keeping the pace for the week day and Sunday issues of THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE, as he has done for two years past.

The person who realizes what it might be to write 500 letters a year in hitchy prose will be excused for a spirit of doubt in these figures. He will be allowed to speculate upon a corps of W. D. Nesbits, who are interchangeable on THE TRIBUNE staff. But to those who know Wilbur D. Nesbit in person there will be no questioning of the fact that there is only one.

Hard for Some to Believe.

But doubtless some explanations will be necessary in these figures and these statements. Mr. Nesbit admits it. Several years ago he received a sharp reminder of the possibility. He had gone to his native Xenia, O., on a visit and incidentally had called upon a local liveryman in passing the stables. Sitting in the office from which the proprietor had excused himself a moment one of the drivers with a friend stepped into the harness room, one thin partition away from the visitor.

"Who was that fellow you spoke to just now?" queried the stableman's friend.

"It's Bill Nesbit, a young fellow who used to live here," is the reply. "He lives east somewhere now."

"What does he do?"

"He writes poetry for a newspaper."

"The —— he does? Say, is that a fact?"

"Sure—and they pay him for it."

"Well," came the comment, together with a sigh, "don't it beat —— what some people will do for a livin'?"

Perhaps the chance versifier would change the query to how a man "can" make a living that way? For newspaper verse has been Nesbit's living and more for several years, as it promises to be his living indefinitely. He is one of a handful in the whole country who are making a living in rhymes, solely, unmixed with the prosaic side of newspaper work. Most of the newspaper poets write more prose than verse in the course of the day's work; with Nesbit his day's stunt is rhyme, and if it is not forthcoming there is a hole in the editorial page where it ought to have been.

First Effort in Advertising.

Once, not to have written the day's rhymes would have meant a hole in an advertising page. For Mr. Nesbit's first poem was dedicated to some stylish straw hats in the front windows of an Indianapolis dry goods house, and the basis of the rhymed rhapsodies was Riley's "The South Wind and the Sun." As the advertising man for the house, Mr. Nesbit's prose had not been effectual. He was already facing the ordeal called in the vernacular "firing" when this parody on Riley was turned to the glorification of the straw hat.

"Who wrote that stuff?" demanded the proprietor of the manager at the sight of the morning's proofs.

"Er—Nesbit—I told him I didn't think it was——"

"Tell him to go ahead and write some more of the kind," broke in the proprietor, and thus out of a Hoosier dry goods store a poet was made.

Newspaper Work Wins Acknowledgment.

The Indianapolis newspapers took him up for the editorial columns, and he was with the Journal in Indianapolis from 1895 to 1898, when he was called to the Baltimore American. From the American, where he was the "Josh Wink" of that paper, devoted to rhyming wit and humor, he came to THE TRIBUNE, where his critics concede he "has found himself." "The Trail to Boyland" is the first acknowledgment of it in the book world, from the presses of the Bobbs-Merrill company. In THE TRIBUNE his friends first saw more than the "Josh Wink" in him when he took up his "Sermons in Song" as the Monday morning feature of THE TRIBUNE'S editorial page. Nesbit himself perhaps would say that he has cut deeper in this feature than in any other.

Then why did they not constitute the first book? For the reason that these eighty-six published poems subtracted from 5,000 leave 4,914 still in his scrapbooks at his home in Evanston, and among these thousands, even his "Sermons in Song," are not overwhelmingly prominent in the scores of other topics treated. And then they are added to, steadily, at an average of two a day!

Plays on the Heart Strings.

But writing two poems a day is not all that may ruffle the serenity of a congenital good nature. The readers' comments may have a good deal to do with it. For instance, one will read something and say, "How like Riley!" and perhaps nod suggestively. Another sees Field in his work, and still another suggests Stanton. But if Riley figures in Nesbit's work it is through Riley's philosophy, preached to the younger poet a few years ago when Riley impressed upon him to avoid writing at the heads of scholars, and instead "write at the hearts of men."

This is the Nesbit idea today. And to the extent that Nesbit goes at the hearts of men through the dialects of the boy, and of the negro, and the farmer he must accept the dialects as they are—and be likened to those who wrote before him. For instance in Nesbit's "Sh-h-h!!" where he strikes so truly the boy nature, he has only the boy dialect of Riley and Field and of everybody else for its expression:

"My ma—she's upstairs in bed,
And ITS there wif her.
ITS all bundled up an' red—
Can't nobody stir;
Can't nobody say a word
Since IT come to us.
Only thing 'at I have heard,
'Ceptin' all ITS fuss,
Is 'SH-H-H!'

"I goed in to see my ma,
Nen climb on the bed.
Was she glad to see me? Pshaw!
'SH-H-H!'—'at's what she said!
Nen IT blinked an' tried to see—
Nen I runned away
Out to my old apple tree
Where no one could say
'SH-H-H!'

"Nen I laid down on th' ground
An' say 'at I jest wish
I was big! An' there's a sound—
'At old tree says 'SH-H-H!'
Nen I cry an' cry an' cry
Till my pa, he hears
An' come there an' wiped my eye
An' mop up the tears—
Nen says 'SH-H-H!'

"I'm go' tell my ma 'at she
Don't suit me one bit—
Why d' they all say 'SH-H-H!' to me
An' not say 'SH-H-H!' to IT?"

"Her Christmas Prayer" His Favorite.

If the child side of the mother be clear to him, so is the mother side of the child, as indicated in "Her Christmas Prayer," which the author has read oftener to himself than almost anything he ever wrote:

Mary Mother, be good to him;
Be kind to him that day—
'Twill be the only Christmas time
That he has been away.

I promised him a world of toys
If he would only stay—
Sure, heaven's full of little boys
That sing and laugh and play.
But you would know the smile of him
Among a thousand more;
His smile will make all else seem dim
When you call him "Asthore."

Sure, you will know him by his eyes,
That are so sweet and blue,
And deep, and clear, and very wise—
They read the heart of you.
His hair is golden as the sun;
His curls they are so quaint
They mind you of the halo on
An angel or a saint.

I promised him a splendid tree,
With candles all aglow.
O, Mary Mother, you can see
'Twas me that loved him so.
And surely, surely, you will see
My boy so sweet and slim—
His eyes are hungering for me
As my eyes are for him.

Mary Mother, be good to him;
Be kind to him that day.
'Twill be the only Christmas time
That he has been away.

His Ideal of an Environment.

Most of Mr. Nesbit's poems are written at his home in Evanston. Such revision as they get is when he copies them on a typewriter in his desk in THE TRIBUNE office. In these compositions he denies that environment cuts any particular figure. Some days the work is easier than it is on others; some days it is a great deal harder. But for the year around he insists that a writing room about thirty-five feet square, high in proportion, with trees at the windows on all sides, and a great writing table exactly in the center of it would be a physical inspiration beyond measure.

Such system as is in his work lies in the small notebook in which he puts down every possible theme for a bit of poetry and in the determination not to look upon his work as more than the work of a day which exacts its unvarying quantity of rhyme. He feels that if he should consider the next six months as a whole, in which 250 poems must be forthcoming from him, he would go to pieces in the contemplation.

Poems Always on Hand.

Nesbit says that he never permits himself to think of more than the work he must do for the one day, and yet when that day's work is off his hands, if he is in the mood he will keep right on, "laying up against a dry spell." These extra poems are crefully deposited in a drawer of his desk, that he calls his "ice box," and are only used when there comes a day when nothing suggests a poem and his brain seems, as he describes it, like a "cold pancake." The verses, "Her Christmas Prayer," for instance, quoted above, were written almost two years before they were printed, and had been entirely forgotten until one day when a hurried search for "something to use" brought them to light.

One characteristic of Mr. Nesbit's verse that has been commented upon generally is its consistent cheerfulness and its avoidance of either subjects or mode of treatment of subjects that would wound the feelings of any reader. Yet, with all this, he tries to avoid mawkishness of sentiment or that overdone gentleness which is usually termed "soft." That the public wants and appreciates virile, ringing verse, whether it touch upon the "common run of things" or the "heart interest" features of existence, is becoming more and more evident.

Serious Poems Are Popular.

Serious verse, as exemplified in his "Sermons in Song," is taking its rightful place in the recognition of the general public. Simply because a man does verses for a newspaper should not be regarded as making it necessary for him to confine himself to the farcical jingle or the broadly humorous verse. The lighter matter, though ephemeral and often inconsequential, holds its own for the day it is printed, but the poems which in a common, natural, whole hearted way touch upon praises of life or of sentiment which are familiar to all are the ones that go into the scrap book and preserve not only the name of the man who writes them but of the paper that publishes them.

It is Mr. Nesbit's opinion that the newspaper taste for verse has undergone a change in the last ten years. Formerly all verse in the newspaper was expected to be in light vein, appropriate to the joker's column. Twenty years ago it could not be too rough in horseplay or too irreverent when the writer undertook to make parodies.

Today, as the exchange man on the newspaper estimates the verse writer's work, it is the serious side of rhyme that appeals to the public. The "Sermons in Song" have had a recognition from the man with the shears such as even Nesbit did not anticipate. This unexpected recognition has been one of the strongest pointers directing the writer away from his first idea of mere jingles. Some of these sermons have found place in the "Trail to Boyland."

WILBUR D. NESBIT